

NORTH CAROLINA STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION



AS I SEE IT

Governor and Legislators Support Public Education in State Budget, More School Funding Challenges Ahead

July 9, 2010

After months of tough choices and hard work, state legislators and the Governor agreed on a final budget at the beginning of July, just in time for the start of a new fiscal year. While the state revenue shortfall still translated into a significant overall cut to public schools, many of the cuts to education funding in the final budget are less severe than they could have been. The bottom line is that our state's needs have grown, but the money we need to meet all of them is simply not there. That is why we are extremely thankful that members of the General Assembly recognized it was imperative to fund schools first and did their best to support education in 2010-11 budget.

We are grateful that this budget saves teaching positions, helps us keep class sizes from getting even larger and does not add to the funding cliff that we know we will face next year when federal stabilization money runs out. We also are pleased that legislators found ways to support some promising new projects and programs. For example, the final budget included \$10 million to continue a pilot program that provides K-3 educators handheld devices to help improve students' reading skills. Governor Perdue and members of the General Assembly also worked together to pass a new law that provides local districts the freedom to do something really innovative and "restart" low-performing schools by giving them the opportunity to use the flexibility provided to charter schools without making the school independent from the district. This new legislation should help many struggling schools try out new teaching and learning techniques and focus more on children at risk of school failure. Programs and strategies such as these will work to keep education in our state moving forward, even in challenging financial times.

Thanks to the members of the General Assembly, public schools will survive this budget year. Yet it is difficult for schools to improve when many are working so hard to survive. And there are some trends we are seeing that are cause for deep concern. For example:

- North Carolina spends less per student in our K-12 public schools than 41 other states.
- Our public schools received less from the state's General Fund in 2009-10 than in 2006-07, even though we now have 30,000 more students.
- We have granted flexibility to school districts when it comes to class sizes in grades 4-12, and we already see a difference. Class sizes are up, and that probably won't change this year or next.

As state funding for education continues to decrease, larger class sizes, limited class schedules, fewer classroom materials, and school buildings in need of repair become a troubling norm for teachers and students across North Carolina. Legislators have done the best they can to minimize the impact of the state's revenue shortfall on our public school classrooms, but we will still see and feel the results of these cuts. It is now up to parents, teachers, principals and other state and local leaders to work together to make sure that, even in this difficult time, our students receive the quality education they deserve and need in order to be successful in the future.

Bill Harrison, Chairman
State Board of Education